



#RenterStateofEmergency #RENTERSOS

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Housing crisis, evictions prompt renewed calls for action

This week, the Community Alliance of Tenants declared a renter state of emergency.

It's a state many people have been living in for a long time. Considering the trauma involved when people cannot find a place to live that they can afford, the impact on

children moved from place to place, the financial crush of meeting basic needs, emergency isn't too strong of a word.

EDITORIAL

The Community Alliance of Tenants, or CAT as it's known, is a nonprofit tenant-rights organization that advocates for low-income renters in the face of unjust housing policies and practices. It operates a help line for tenants who need guidance in navigating the landlord-leaning policies around housing. No-cause evictions, according to CAT, have reached an unprecedented high, in some cases entire buildings of renters having been evicted to make way for higher paying tenants.

No-cause evictions are legal in Oregon. A landlord can evict a resident for any reason, even if the tenant is in complete compliance with the lease. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that individuals and families are being displaced at a time when the market has almost nowhere for them to go. Vacancy rates are in the basement.

CAT is reporting callers with mental and physical health impacts stemming from the trauma of eviction and relocation, in addition to the impact on employment, children's education and stability. This isn't just a problem for low-income tenants. Rents in Portland, on all types of housing, are averaging 13 percent annual increases. This is a problem for everyone who is working for a living, and hoping to continue doing so in Portland.

The impact trickles down to our streets. For example, the city and the county, along with multiple agencies, are working to house all homeless veterans by the end of the year. It has made great progress, but one obstacle

to housing is that some apartments made available to them are too expensive even with a federal subsidy. The rent is too damn high, even for the federal government.

The Renter State of Emergency campaign is just the latest grassroots groundswell around the issue that has galvanized hundreds of diverse organizations across the state. There are many people working on this, and there are long-term efforts in the works to incentivize affordable housing. Among them, the push on City Hall to raise the amount of urban renewal money dedicated to affordable housing from 30 percent to 50 percent. (See "For Families like Jeff's" commentary, page 11). From the state on down, lawmakers have allocated funding to try to alleviate the affordable housing crisis — a shortage that now stretches into the tens of thousands of units in Multnomah County alone. And despite the proliferation of apartment construction, only a small fraction is committed to affordable housing. We can't build our way of this in the short term.

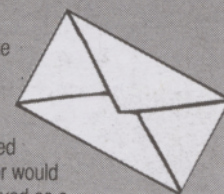
It's going to take more than just action here in the City of Roses. It's going to take pressure on state lawmakers to correct the structural impediments to a livable city for all. There are several, simple paths to creating sustainable funding that other states use that are banned in Oregon. That has to change.

What can you do? You can start by getting educated and involved with the issue, even if you're living it first hand. CAT is launching its campaign with a press event at 6 p.m., Sept. 16 in Peninsula Park, 700 Rosa Parks Way and Kerby. They will be calling for emergency measures to temper the rental market while long-term solutions create stability. The campaign is also collecting stories about the rising rental costs and eviction consequences from Portland renters. Let your voice be heard.

You can also learn more at www.oregoncat.org and at welcomehomecoalition.org. You can also follow along the conversation at #RenterSOS and #RenterStateofEmergency social media platforms.

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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